

Jerónimo, Miguel Bandeira. *The 'Civilising Mission' of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870-1930*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-137-35590-4

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Portugal formally abolished slavery in its African colonies in 1878, but the legal termination of slavery did not result in a system of free wage labor in the Portuguese Empire. On the contrary, compulsory native labor was one of the pivotal features of the Portuguese colonial system in Africa, a practice championed by the Portuguese legislators regardless of the nature of the political regime that existed in Portugal. For the Portuguese State, work was part of the natives' civilizing process, whereby the authorities had the right and even the obligation to force natives to work. The natives had the legal and moral obligation to work so as to "improve their material and moral condition," and, if not performed voluntarily, it would be imposed by the State. As such, special labor laws were introduced, stipulating that natives had to work; with the law on its side, the State could force the natives to work not only in public works, but also for private enterprises.²

It is precisely in this context that we need to understand Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo's approach in *The Civilising Mission of Portuguese Colonialism, 1870-1930*. In this book, Jerónimo proposes a critical historical analysis of how the doctrine of a "civilizing mission" in Portuguese colonialism was formed and developed, between 1870 and 1930, focusing in particular on the question of native labor. Jerónimo explores the policies adopted for the recruitment, employment, organization, and distribution of native labor in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, demonstrating the presence of a labor system rooted in multiple forms of forced or compulsory labor targeted at native workers. Jerónimo shows, quite relevantly, that the labor system was legitimized by a number of racialized perspectives in favor of forced or compulsory labor, which formed an essential part of the doctrinal *corpus* of the "civilizing mission" of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. Work, it was believed, was the foremost instrument in the process of raising the native population to the

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² From a legislative point of view, attention is drawn to the importance of the General Regulation on Native Labor, of November 9, 1899, enacted by decree of the Secretary of State for Naval and Overseas Affairs and promulgated by Government Decree no. 262 of November 18, 1899.

accepted standards of civilization. Moreover, Jerónimo also draws attention to the international and transnational dimension of the debates that took place on some aspects of Portuguese colonialism, in particular the persistence of forms of forced labor—similar to slavery—in the Portuguese colonies. He further examines the impact that such debates had on the definition of Portuguese foreign and colonial policy in the period immediately before the end of the monarchy and during the First Republic.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first part, “The Civilisation Guild: Native Labour and Portuguese Colonialism,” Jerónimo deconstructs the doctrine of the “civilizing mission,” showing that it was not based on the education or Christianization of Africans, but rather on creating the necessary conditions to prepare and induce the “bodies and souls” of natives to work, in a compulsory fashion if necessary. As such, colonial authorities had “the duty to force natives to work,” paring down the civilizing process of natives to an “education for and through work.” This position was favored by a significant number of Portuguese colonial thinkers and administrators, among whom were António Enes, Eduardo da Costa, and Paiva Couceiro. Behind the rhetoric of the “civilizing mission,” there lay a ruthless labor system that exploited the native population, reduced to a mere “work machine” acting in the economic interests of private companies and the colonial administration. The case of São Tomé, meticulously described by the author, is a particularly striking and enlightening example of the labor system centered on the brutal exploitation of native workers—the so-called *serviçais* (servants)—“hired” to work on the *roças* (cocoa plantations) on that island.

In the second part of the book, “Colonialism Without Borders,” Jerónimo addresses, in a very pertinent way, the role of transnational powers and dynamics in the definition of Portuguese colonialism in Africa. He gives as examples the action of humanitarian anti-slavery movements, missionaries, and progressive and modernizing movements focused on colonial problems and contexts, as well as the League of Nations. Particular attention is paid to a report by the American sociologist Edward Ross³ on native labor in Portuguese Africa, especially in Angola and Mozambique. Jerónimo examines the conditions under which the document was produced, its purpose and contents, and analyzes the academic, civic and political background of the sociologist. The author thus makes it clear that an international and transnational perspective is required in order to understand the colonial phenomenon in the Portuguese Empire.

³ Ross, Edward A., *Report on Employment of Native Labor in Portuguese Africa*. New York: Abbott Press, 1925.

Having said this, the book does not sufficiently explore certain aspects of the colonial phenomenon directly related to the question of native labor—and, consequently, to the “civilizing mission”—in the Portuguese colonies.

Firstly, not enough attention is paid to the issue of the native workers’ agency and the author fails to present (at least in any significant number) what would have been useful direct testimonials from those workers. To do so, the author would have had to use other types of methodologies, such as those of so-called oral history (particularly significant in the mostly illiterate African context⁴) or those used by subaltern studies.⁵ One case which the author could have easily tackled in greater depth was that of the railway and port facilities of Mozambique, where white workers and a significant number of African workers were paid to work under very harsh conditions.⁶ It would have been useful to search the archives of the colonial railway or port administration companies and to examine the Mozambican working-class press, in particular the socialist-minded newspaper *O Emancipador*. Furthermore, the few references made by the author to the *Grémio Africano* in Lourenço Marques—the owner of the newspaper *O Brado Africano*—are perhaps not ideal for understanding the agency of native workers in Mozambique, since that association represented the interests of the mestizo and black Europeanized petty bourgeoisie of the Mozambican capital. On account of its somewhat privileged position in the colonial society, this petty bourgeoisie enjoyed an economic, social, cultural, political, and legal standing that was different from that of most of the natives.⁷

This brings us to another important matter that is also not sufficiently developed by Miguel Jerónimo: class divisions in colonial society, in particular among the African population. In fact, the book tends to overemphasize the racial factor to the detriment of the class factor, highlighting the differences between Europeans and Africans, but, to some extent, blurring the schisms between different classes within both the white population and the black population. In the urban space, in particular, but also in some rural areas, class often took precedence over racial affiliation, creating divisions within the same racial category and developing forms of solidarity between individuals of different races. This is

⁴ Vansina, Jan, *Oral Tradition as History*. London: James Currey, 1985.

⁵ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, “Can the Subaltern Speak,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.). Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988, pp. 271-313; Guha, Ranajit and Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (eds.), *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

⁶ Penvenne, Jeanne Marie, “De 1900 a 1930: lutas operárias no porto de Lourenço Marques,” *Tempo*, n° 499, 1980, pp. 16-21, n° 500, 1980, pp. 30-36. Penvenne, Jeanne Marie, *African Workers and Colonial Racism. Mozambican Strategies and Struggles in Lourenço Marques, 1877-1962*. London: James Currey, 1995.

⁷ Neves, Olga Iglésias, “Moçambique,” in *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa* (Dir. A. H. Oliveira Marques). Lisbon: Estampa, 2001, pp. 469-584.

why, in towns such as Luanda, Lobito, Benguela, Lourenço Marques, or Beira, the interests of native workers and those of the African petty bourgeoisie were not in alignment with one another.⁸ On the contrary, there is much documentary evidence of the relationship of cooperation, and even of some promiscuity that existed between the African petty bourgeoisie of Luanda and Benguela and the white bourgeoisie living in the main Angolan towns, all of whom were involved in the same process exploiting native labor.⁹ The same consideration applied to the cases of solidarity between white and black workers, especially in Mozambican ports and railways.¹⁰

Miguel Jerónimo similarly does not pay sufficient heed to the experiments at economic modernization conducted by the Portuguese in Africa, particularly by those who sought to change the labor system. Above all, I am referring to the plan for socio-economic and administrative modernization directed by Norton de Matos in Angola, during the First Republic.¹¹ Norton de Matos's aim was to modernize the Angolan economy, administration, and society by creating fundamental infrastructures and communication routes, backed by public and private funds, through the institutionalization of an accessible credit system and the creation of an integrated domestic market, as well as by extending the circulation of money to the entire colony. The imposition of a free wage labor system was one of the cornerstones of the plan for the modernization of the Angolan economy and society, regarded as essential for integrating the natives into the monetarized economy. Moreover, Norton de Matos intended to form a class of African landowners and farmers capable of contributing to the development of a capitalist-based agriculture, instead of a system that was concerned with subsistence alone. This was a means of fostering agricultural development, already geared towards the export of raw materials, and also of creating a native domestic market that would be capable of absorbing the products from

⁸ Pimenta, Fernando Tavares, "Identidades, sociabilidades e urbanidades na África Colonial Portuguesa: Angola e Moçambique" in *Tra due crisi: urbanizzazione, mutamenti sociali e cultura di massa tra gli anni Trenta e gli anni Settanta* (a cura di M. Pasetti). Bologna: Archetipolibri/Quaderni di Storicamente, 2013, pp. 183-200. Dias, Jill, "Uma questão de identidade: respostas intelectuais às transformações económicas no seio da elite crioula da Angola portuguesa entre 1870 e 1930," *Revista Internacional de Estudos Africanos*, n.º 1, 1984, pp. 61-94. Oliveira, Mário António Fernandes de, *Reler África*. Coimbra: Instituto de Antropologia da Universidade de Coimbra, 1990.

⁹ Pimenta, Fernando Tavares, *Branços de Angola. Autonomismo e Nacionalismo, 1900-1961*. Coimbra, Minerva, 2005. Santos, Maria Emília Madeira (ed.), *A África e a instalação do sistema colonial (c. 1885–c. 1930)*. *Actas da III Reunião Internacional de História de África*. Lisbon: Centro de Estudos de História e Cartografia Antiga, 2000. Oliveira, Mário António Fernandes de, *A formação da literatura angolana (1851-1950)*. Lisbon: Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 1997.

¹⁰ Capela, José, *O Movimento Operário em Lourenço Marques, 1898-1927*. Porto: Afrontamento, 1981.

¹¹ Dáskalos, Maria Alexandre, *A política de Norton de Matos para Angola 1912-1915*. Coimbra: Minerva, 2008. Neto, Sérgio, *Do Minho ao Mandovi. Um estudo sobre o pensamento colonial de Norton de Matos*. Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2016.

mainland Portugal. This is why Norton de Matos sought to impede the families of white farmers from hiring native workers, a measure that was also applied in the white settlements during the period of the Estado Novo. Thus, the legislation enacted between 19 April and 21 December 1913, while Norton de Matos was the Governor-General of Angola, required payments to be made in money to all laborers, regardless of how they had been recruited, and stipulated a minimum wage, working hours, and rest periods. Norton de Matos also took measures to limit the arbitrariness in labor recruitment for the cocoa plantations in São Tomé, pursuing this policy to modernize the Angolan economy and society while he was the High Commissioner in the 1920s and sparking strong protests from some sections of the white settler community.¹²

Another issue that should also have warranted greater attention from Miguel Jerónimo was the relationship between white colonization and native labor in the Portuguese Empire. This was a central issue in all European settler colonies in Africa, where the settlers—given their demographic limitations—were never able to do without African labor.¹³ In Angola, settlers were actively engaged in the discussion about native labor and they put forward concrete proposals for defining both the native labor system and the *Estatuto do Indigenato*. In this particular regard, the case of the *Congresso Distrital de Benguela* (District Congress of Benguela) should be emphasized, as it is one of the most relevant examples of the white settlers' political agency in Angola.

The *Congresso Distrital de Benguela* was held in July 1913 and was attended by about one hundred and fifty delegates—mostly white, but also some assimilated mestizos and blacks—from Central Angola. This event ultimately defined the political views of white settlers on the colony's crucial problems, in particular the native issue. In addition to defining the criteria to be followed in the civilization of natives, the congress members sought to prepare the basis for a possible regulation on native labor. Thus, the proposal was approved to enact a code or a general law on native labor, which was to enforce compulsory labor for natives on the grounds that the aim was to avoid vagrancy and crime. The principle of compulsory labor entailed a number of orders: the realization of a census of the native population that was capable of working; the introduction of an identity card for the natives; and the “the repression of vagrancy” by the colonial police. Another decision was to impose the obligation on all natives to send their children to school or to

¹² Matos, J. M. Norton de, *A Província de Angola*. Porto: Edição Maranus, 1926; Torres, Adelino, *O Império Português entre o real e o imaginário*. Lisbon: Escher, 1991.

¹³ On this subject, see Pimenta, Fernando Tavares, “Colonialismo Demográfico Português em Angola: Historiografia, Identidade e Memória,” *Revista de Teoria da História*, vol. 17, n.º 1, Julho 2017, pp. 219-246.

the homes of Europeans or assimilated Africans to “learn domestic or agricultural work.” In addressing the question of the temporary emigration of native workers from Angola to the cocoa plantations in São Tomé, the Congress decided that the district could still supply manpower to São Tomé but not to the island of Príncipe, which was known to be affected by the sleeping sickness (*doença do sono*). However, the economic associations of the Benguela district, the city councils, and the municipal commissions were also to have their say in the definition of the maximum number of workers to be sent to São Tomé, as well as on the duration of their contracts. In order to “protect the rights of native workers,” the congress members felt that the future general law should consider two principles on native labor: the payment of the full salary in cash was made mandatory while the employer would also have to cover the medical expenses of the worker if the contract lasted for more than one year.¹⁴

Undoubtedly, the aim of the Congress was to secure the promulgation of a general labor law that would force the natives to work in the economic enterprises of the settlers (and assimilated Africans). As such, the settlers were interested in maintaining a labor system based on the exploitation of native manpower. Therefore, Norton de Matos’s plan to promote a system of free wage labor was not welcomed by a substantial number of white settlers, many of whom were greatly lacking in funds and considered the use of forced labor essential for ensuring the accumulation of wealth via their income from farming. Thus, they were not ready to assume the economic modernization proposed by Norton de Matos, particularly concerning the question of native labor.

The most vehement protests against Norton de Matos’s labor policy came from the white settlers in Southern Angola, due to the shortage of native manpower in that region of the colony. One of the most outspoken settlers opposed to Norton de Matos was Venâncio Henriques Guimarães, a major landowner in Huíla.¹⁵ Guimarães criticized the native labor laws introduced by Norton Matos, as he felt they were damaging to the economic interests of the settlers, claiming it was prejudicial to withdraw the mechanisms that penalized natives who failed to comply with the moral and legal obligation to work. Nor did he accept the idea of transforming the natives into free peasants and landowners, as he feared this would bolster the economic independence of African populations, which in turn could foreshadow the threat of a future political independence for the blacks. Júlio

¹⁴ *Jornal de Benguela*, Ano II, n.º 29, de 16 de Julho de 1913, p. 5.

¹⁵ Guimarães, Venâncio, *Angola. Uma administração ruínosa. Para a história do reinado de Norton*. Lisbon: Imprensa Lucas, 1923. Cf. Clarence-Smith, Gervase, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola, 1840-1926*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Ferreira Pinto, the president of the *Associação Comercial de Benguela* (Benguela Trade Association), was, in some respects, of the same opinion.¹⁶

Nevertheless, Norton de Matos's policy in Angola shows that, within the Portuguese colonial administration, there were several perceptions of the "civilizing mission," particularly in regard to the question of native labor. Thus, irrespective of a legal system of forced labor, tangible steps were taken to promote free wage labor among the native population, at least in Angola. Clearly, there were tensions within Portuguese colonialism regarding the issue of native labor. Moreover, side by side with an archaic perspective that defended forced labor there was also a more modern perspective present from the outset in the policy of Norton de Matos that, later, in the 1940s was continued by the Governor-General of Angola, Álvaro Freitas Morna.¹⁷

All this shows the need for adopting a more comprehensive perspective on the question of the "civilizing mission," especially in regard to native labor, while also taking into consideration certain factors that were inherent in the colonial situation and not only those of an international or transnational nature. However, these are facts that Miguel Jerónimo will certainly expand upon in upcoming works, with this book being an interesting starting point for future in-depth research on the relationship between native labor and the "civilizing mission" within the framework of the Portuguese Colonial Empire.

¹⁶ Pinto, Júlio Ferreira, *Angola. Notas e comentários de um colono*. Lisbon: J. Rodrigues, 1926.

¹⁷ Álvaro de Freitas Morna, *Problemas económicos da colónia*. Luanda: Imprensa Nacional, 1943; Morna, Álvaro de Freitas, *Angola. Um ano no Governo-Geral*. Lisbon: Livraria Popular de Francisco Franco, 1944.